2:Seligman & Seligman E-5 (1909-1910) 1932
FJ23 Shilluk FJ23

Chapter II

THE SHILLUK

The Shilluk country forms a narrow fringe on the west bank of the Nile, from Kaka in the north to within 30 miles of Lake No in the south. From Kodok to Taufikia the Shilluk also occupy the east bank, and their villages extend some 35 miles up the Sobat River, principally on the north bank. Theirs is the flat grass country, dry in the dry season, swampy in the wet, extending on both sides of the Nile; hence cattle are their wealth and principal care, and although a considerable quantity of millet is grown not enough is harvested to provide fully for the relatively dense population, and scarcity is by no means unusual. A census taken in 1903 gave a population of nearly 40,000, possessing over 12,000 head of cattle and nearly 64,000 sheep and goats. No doubt the number of cattle returned was unduly low, but, making all allowances, the Shilluk are poorer in cattle than are the Dinka. The 1903 figure is far below that suggested by Schweinfurth (1,200,000), and at the present time it is likely that the Shilluk number some 100,000.

We have stated in Chapter I that in our opinion the homeland of the Shilluk-speaking tribes lay to the east of Lake Victoria. We have no historical record of a northerly movement, all we can say is that a series of migrations gave rise to a number of tribes speaking Shilluk dialects in what is now the Bahr el Ghazal Province, and that from one of these, the Luo, the Shilluk nation of history originated.

The researches of the Rev. Father Hofmayr of the Austrian Mission[1] indicate that the Luo—the Shilluk-speaking "Jur"—of the Bahr el Ghazal Province represent the remains of what was once a greater Luo people, from whom are derived the present Shilluk nation, or, more accurately, a certain number of their leading families including that of the king. Here in the neighbourhood of the present Luo country, the land of Dimo of the legends, Nyakang—the leader, culture-hero, and first king of the Shilluk—lived with his half-brother's son, Dimo, until the enmity of the latter drove Nyakang and his followers to seek fresh homes to the east and so brought into existence

[1] Wilhelm Hofmayr, *Die Schilluk. Geschichte, Religion und Leben eines Niloten-Stammes*, Wien, 1925.

3:Westermann E-5 (1910) 1912 FJ23 Shilluk FJ23

I. DESCRIPTION OF THE COUNTRY AND ITS PEOPLE.

101 NAME The inhabitants are called: *collɔ̀*, "a Shilluk", plural *wote cʌ̀l*, "children of Shilluk", "Shilluks"; the country is called *fɔ̀* *cʌ̀l* "country of the Shilluks." The word *cʌ̀l* perhaps means "black", vide below. A second name of the people is *cʌ̀ŋiŋ*, "descendants of *kʌ̀ŋiŋ*," this name is connected with Nyikang, the national hero of the Shilluks. The name "Shilluk" (singular Shilkawi) is given to them by the Arabs, and has now become their common designation; it is of course derived from *cʌ̀ŋiŋ*. Other appellations, which are in use among the neighbours of the Shilluks, vide page 44.

131 EXTENSION OF THE COUNTRY The Shilluk country is situated on the western banks of the White Nile, from Kaka to Lake No, that is from about 10°5′ to 9°5′ northern latitude, a length of nearly 350 km, and a width of 5 to 6 hours. Near the mouth of the Sobat (Bahr El Asraf, "Yellow River") a number of Shilluks live on the eastern shore of the White Nile, on both sides of the lower Sobat, chiefly on its northern bank. They extend about 35 miles up the Sobat, the last Shilluk village up river being Nagdyob. There is also a group of Shilluk settlements at Shakwa El Shilkawi (= Shilluk), near Bahr El Zeraf, on the right bank of the Nile, and on Khor Atar, south of Tonga (*Tuiŋ*). North of Kaka the first Shilluk settlements are found on Aba Island, on the north- and south-end of which there is a small Shilluk village each. Near Mazrua Island there is also a Shilluk village on the right bank of the Nile. Again single settlements are met with on Mazrua Island, Wad Dakena Island, and on the north-end of the Gezira Wad Bolkar.

103 The Shilluks themselves designate the extension of their country by naming the most northern and the most southern village and district of their Kingdom, viz. Mwomo and Tonga (*Mogwa, Tuiŋ*), which term corresponds exactly to the expression of the ancient Hebrews: from Dan unto Bersheba.

131 174 In former times the country of the Shilluks seems to have been larger than it is now. According to older reports it not only extended farther northwards, whence they were driven back by Arab tribes, but they are also said to have, in the 17th century, inhabited both sides of the White Nile south of Kawa; Kawa is situated a little south of El Dueim; so, provided this report is right, they owned at that time a tract of territory nearly three times as great as that they inhabit to-day.

132 CLIMATE From January to April the climate of the country is dry and warm. April is

3:Westermann E-5 (1910) 1912 FJ23 Shilluk FJ23

the hottest month of the year. June to September constitutes the rainy season, and from October to December the larger part of the country is flooded with water, but the marshes and smaller Khors[1] all dry up by April. From November to April the climate is not unhealthy for Europeans. During the wet season mosquitoes are numerous. Malaria and black water fever are the diseases most dangerous to white people.

SOIL

The country is a plain with only inconsiderable elevations, on which the villages of the natives are built. The soil is black and fertile near the river and the khors, back from the water courses it is in most places poorer, sometimes sandy.

VEGETATION

The chief vegetation is high grass, interspersed with shrubs. A light forest of acacia trees is found mainly along the Nile. The acacia is the chief representative of the tree-flora: heglig (Balanites aegyptiaca), sont-acacia (Acacia arabica), Talh (Acacia Seyal), different kinds of gum-acacias, etc. A characteristic feature of the landscape are groups of deleib- and dom-palms (Borassus flabellifer and Hyphaena Thebaica); a beautiful tree is the mahogany tree (Khaya senegalensis); it is most useful as timber, but seems to be rather rare in the Shilluk country; other notable trees are: different kinds of Ficus (Sycomore fig), the ardeib tree (Tamarindus indicus), nabag (a fruit tree) etc. The vegetation on the river is most luxuriant. Though this is not the region of the sudd, yet the river is at most times largely covered with single plants and swimming islands, formed of papyrus, ambach (Herminiera Elaphroxylon), several kinds of reeds, lotus, Umm Suf (Vossia procera), Potamogeton, Ottelia, and many others. The floating vegetation often serves birds for a fishing place. Trees are much hampered in their growth by the fires which the natives light while the grass is dry; the reason for burning the grass is to hunt up game, and to get the ground cleared for cultivation.

ANIMALS

The country being thickly populated, game is not very numerous. But at some distance from the settlements large animals are still frequent, chiefly near the river towards Lake No; the neighbourhood of Kaka and north of it are also rich in game. Elephants, giraffes, buffaloes are met with, though not very frequently; antelopes and gazelles abound: bushbuck (Tragelaphus scriptus), reedbuck (Cervicapra bohor), white-eared cob (Cobus leucotis), ariel (Gazella soemmeringi), dorcas (G. dorcas), isabelline gazelle (G. isabella), oryx, waterbuck (Cobus defassa), Mrs. Gray's waterbuck (Cobus maria), gazella rubifrons, roan antelope (Hippotragus equinus bakeri), hartebeest (Bubalis jacksoni), tiang or Bastard Hartebeest (Damaliscus tiang), Oribi antelope (Ourebia) etc. Of the carnivorous family the most notable are: lion, leopard, jackal, hyena, fox, Zorilla (a little black-and-white animal resembling the American skunk),

[1] Khor (Arab) — water course drying up in the rainless season.

5:Lienhardt E-4 (no date) 1954 FJ23 Shilluk FJ23

ornaments—which are among the royal emblems of the Shilluk at the present day, and are given to a new king at his installation.[1] The crossing of the river and the fight with the Sun seem to be occurrences of great imaginative importance for the Shilluk, as they are for the Western Dinka, in whose mythology they appear in a different form, and by whom they are associated, though in different ways, with a mythical leader who in many ways resembles Nyikang. It may be mentioned that the sun, in Shilluk country, seems to be at its hottest at the end of the dry season, just before the rains, and its heat is in a sense overcome when the rains fall. Nyikang is believed to bring the rain, and in that sense still revives his people by sprinkling them with water. At this time, too, those who have been herding cattle for the dry season on islands in the river or in pastures on the east bank of the Nile, must return to their homes on the west bank to cultivate, crossing the river in order to do so. The subduing of the Sun, and the crossing of the river by Nyikang and his followers, thus recur in different form in the lives of the Shilluk. They still have to take their cattle to pasture across the river during the dry season, and return home with them when the rains start. Westermann says that:

> The Shilluks along the White Nile cross over to the east bank; likewise the cattle of the Sobat Shilluks descend to the lagoons south of the Sobat. So in both cases they have to cross the rivers, which is, on account of the many crocodiles living in them, not undangerous, and is therefore done with much care and accompanied by weighty ceremonies in order to keep the crocodiles away; this forms an important part of the duties of the witch-doctor.[2]

In the account he gives of such a river crossing, it is said that the cattle are led behind ambatch canoes which the Shilluk use.[3] It will be remembered that the effigy of the 'crosser of the river', Nyikang, used in the installation ceremonies for the king is also made of ambatch.[4] Nyikang is important for that crossing on which the Shilluk herds depend for their grazing. In another Shilluk text Nyikang asks his mother, Nyakaya, to dry up the river in order to help his people against foreign enemies.[5]

In the stories here summarized, Nyikang, the leader and first king of the Shilluk, is able to affect celestial phenomena—he may also raise winds and bring rain—and he divides the river to lead his people across. By agnatic descent he is linked either with a man from heaven or with a special creation of God, and through his mother, Nyakaya, he is linked with the river. He is also the leader by whom the Shilluk were first differentiated as a separate people, and who gave them their present land. His praise-names and titles of honour acknowledge and record his association with sky, river, and earth. Apart from those already mentioned, he has the names 'heaven'

[1] Cranolara, 1930, p. 30.
[2] Westermann, 1912, Introduction, xxix–xxx.
[3] Ibid., p. 172.
[4] Thomson, 1948, p. 130. This is a correction of Howell and Thomson, 1946, where it is said that the effigy of Nyikang was made of bamboo, like that of his son Dak.
[5] Hofmayr, 1925, p. 55.

Some Observations of a Fieldtrip among the Shilluk

Mohamed Riad

131 The Shilluk occupy a country that extends from 10°45' N. to 9°15' latitude. Particularly the west bank of the WHITE NILE from about 50 kilometers north of Kaka to approximately 50 kilometers east of Lake No. There is also a Shilluk pocket within Northern Dinkaland. Thus they occupy the right bank of the White Nile from near Kodok to the confluence of the Sobat. They also extend some 60 kilometers up the Sobat river, mainly on its northern bank.

361 The Shilluk settlements, if they can be called villages, are situated from about half a kilometer to a kilometer off the river bank giving the impression of beads hung on a string(1). Also, on the banks of the khors i.e. seasonal streams which discharge into the Nile, rising from the west or east and sloping toward the Nile, Shilluk settlements are to be found. The breadth of the Shilluk land does not exceed a five hour march from the banks of the river(2) and there is a no-man's land which stretches back to the west till the Nuba-hills. This is used as a dry season (winter) grazing land by both Shilluk and nomad Baggara Arabs, but the Shilluk do not, as a rule, pasture their cattle so far to the west. This area is quite well-known only in those areas where roads go up from the river banks to the Nuba mountains. 133 The hydrology of this area is not known although some khors intersect it with courses estimated as parallel to the Nile and joining other khors to discharge seasonal waters into the Nile north of Kaka.

171 The Nile is the main waterway in the Shilluk land and because the 226 Shilluk have a comparatively long water front they are the most skilled fishermen of the Nilotic group. The most important khor is one called Collo which takes its waters from the Nile, or more precisely from the bank-swamps against Malakal and runs parallel to the Nile separated from it only by a stretch of comparatively high bank, one to three kilometers broad, and then discharges again in the Nile south of Kodok. Again there is another khor called khor Arepejar which rises from the west and discharges into the Lollo. (3) This khor is of almost no hydrological importance, but of a great significance in the realm of Shilluk cosmology and spiritual thinking. This khor is 79 the boundary between the two religious provinces into which Shillukland is 63 divided. On its banks one of the important rites of king installation takes place.

132 The Shilluk country is more or less a flat land covered with Savannah grass and with occasional clusters of trees, mainly along river 133 and khor banks. The most famous tree is the Dolob(Borrassus aethiopum) 137 which grows in beautiful groves on the Nile banks. The rainy season begins in May but occasional showers heralding the rains occur at the end of March and early April. The dry season begins near the end of October. Rainfall is heaviest in the south. Here is the mean annual rainfall at our stations:-

Fangak	(9°05'N)	1187 mm
Malakal	(9°32')	737 mm
Kodok	(9°55')	682 mm
Renk	(11°45')	506 mm

15: Oyler M-5 (ca. 1918) 1926 FJ23 Shilluk FJ23

the liver, stomach, heart, tongue, upper lip, lower lip, and lungs. The walls of the house are then pushed down, and these bits are cast on the mound. They are to be thrown by a servant of Deń. The soup in which the meat was cooked is taken by the chief servant of Deń present, and the next in rank takes a gourd of beer, and they pour these upon the mound at the same time that the meat is thrown on it. The people then dance, while they sing a song of Deń. While the servants of Deń put the higlig branch (ȳk Deń) in place, the rest of the people run to the river to take a bath.

At the close of the rainy season the family of the person who has been struck by lightning invite the people of the village to drink beer. One gourd full of the beer is thrown into the air for Deń. This observance often becomes an annual event in the family. They think it helps to keep the lightning away.

A house is never built on the exact location of a house that has been struck by lightning, though another may be built near the place. An object that has been struck by lightning is sometimes worshipped. Sacrifices may be killed and eaten in front of it.

Many of these ceremonies are borrowed from the Dinkas. Deń is worshipped by the Dinkas; they are "Deń's people." He is the spirit of the rain, or the rain.

The rains at the beginning and close of the rainy season are very often accompanied by considerable electrical displays. It is small wonder that the natives behold in amazed terror the wonderful power of nature, and it is still less cause to marvel that they try to placate the powers of the storm. The westerner, with his scientific knowledge of electricity, is often awed by the gleam of the lightning and the crash of thunder, and it is not surprising that the uneducated native is even more awed by it.

Rites connected with the Dance Initiation.

The Shilluk lad looks forward with eagerness to the time when he will be permitted to join in the dances of his people. Not only does he long for the time because of the social pleasure, as dancing is the chief amusement of the people, but the right to dance carries with it other privileges.

21: Mutwakil U-5 (1946) 1947 FJ23 Shilluk FJ23
Dinka FJ12

S 243

It is very difficult to distinguish between the plants or the seeds of these different sub-varieties. Certainly I cannot recognize the differences myself, but I also doubt whether the Shilluk can do so without being misled quite often. All these sub-varieties are generally treated, and behave, in the same way. They are sown early in June, reach maturity in 90-100 days, (exceptions are the heavy sub-varieties), and are harvested in mid-September in a normal year.

2. *Rwat* is the Dinka name for the Shilluk *kwalli*. ? D 243

The same sub-varieties exist among the Dinka, and the names given above for the sub-varieties are used by them.

It is also grown as an early crop in Dinka land, but in much smaller quantities, as a subsistence crop only.

3. *Jak* is the Dinka name for the heavy, late-maturing dura. It is the Dinka main crop, and has several sub-varieties, of which those commonly known are :—

Awet	Seed colour white.	
Kuchuka	,,	,, yellowish.
Kwayan	,,	,, orange red.

Again seed colour is not as pure as the above description may convey. A mixture of colours is always a usual sight in a field of this dura.

All sub-varieties of the *Jak* are considered as heavy or late-maturing. They are usually sown early in July, reach maturity in about six months, and are harvested towards the end of December.

4. *Agono* meaning ' white dura ' is the Shilluk name for the Dinka *Jak*. S 243

The same sub-varieties and their names as above are also used by the Shilluk. As a crop plant, however, the *Agono* is grown but little in the Shilluk district, except among the southern Shilluk between Malakal and Tonga, where it is grown as a main crop.

5. *Angul*, meaning in Shilluk, ' dura of the wind,' is a winter dura.

The name refers to no one variety, but actually any crop which is sown so late in the rains that it benefits from the cool north (winter) wind, is known to the Shilluk as *angul*. S [132]

As the wet period from which the *angul* may be expected to benefit is very short, it is natural that only quick-maturing varieties are selected for the purpose.

? [i.e., early red dura. -Analyst]

29:Dempsey M-5 (1940-1954) 1955
FJ23 Shilluk FJ23

Chapter II

THE PROMISED LAND

I AWOKE refreshed from sleep, and in the bright morning sunshine I was able to survey my new dwelling place. It was no Eden. In Africa there are many places of wonderful natural beauty, but Detwok is not one of them. Right in front of the house stood the ignoble remains of a brick kiln, and that together with the dried-up appearance of the soil gave one the impression of standing in a well-burnt brick-field. One looked ahead over an expanse of baked earth scarcely relieved by tufts of grass, yellow and shrivelled by the heat, and low clumps of thorn bushes and saw the river shining in the distance. To right and left of the house, indeed almost surrounding the compound in the rear, was a forest of vicious-looking thorn bush beyond which, half a mile away, could be seen the Shilluk villages thinly strung out in line, like, as one writer has put it, 'beads on a string'. In the compound itself were the Fathers' house, a substantial building just recently completed by the Italian Fathers with bricks burnt in the kiln whose ruins still remained, the Convent of the Sisters and a two-storey building with a school below and chapel above.

The scene was unlovely in the extreme. The earth of all that portion of the Upper Nile Province apart from the swamps is cotton soil, which, though eminently suitable for the growing of cotton, is useful for little else. In the dry season, lasting from November to June, its surface is rough and hard, broken by large cracks into which a bicycle wheel can easily slip as far as the hub; in the time of the rains it soon becomes a mass of grey viscous mud as unsafe for a careless walker as the surface of an ice rink. After a few weeks of heavy rain most of the countryside turns into a vast swamp through which one must wade knee-deep in water,